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Carol X Weakley 10/11/2006 04:32:50 PM From DB/Inbox: Carol X Weakley

Cable
Text:

C O N F I D E N T I A L TEL AVIV 04001

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 TEL AVIV 004001

SIPDIS

H PASS TO SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/10/2016

TAGS: PREL PGOV OREP IS LE KWBG

SUBJECT: CODEL WARNER'S MEETING WITH FOREIGN MINISTER LIVNI

REF: TEL AVIV 3909

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Gene A. Cretz,
Reason 1.4 (b) (d)

11. (C) Summary. CODEL Warner met with Foreign Minister Livni at MFA October 3 (reftel reports the CODEL's meeting with Prime Minister Olmert). Asked whether Israel's war with Hezbollah and moderate Arab fear of Iran had created new opportunities, Livni said Israel had some common interests with both Lebanese Prime Minister Siniora and Palestinian Authority President Abbas, but she described both leaders as "weak." There was good news, she said, that moderate Arab leaders saw a growing threat from Iran, but the bad news was that Arab public opinion still viewed Israel as the enemy. Israel was not sure whether Arab leaders were ready to move closer to Israel in spite of their public opinion. Israel, she said, was ready to take "calculated risks," but it would not compromise on its survival. Turning to democratization in the Arab world, Livni suggested that acceptance of democratic values should be a precondition for participation in elections. In order to ensure that Hezbollah remained weakened, Livni said the international community would need to enforce the arms embargo. Livni complained that Israel had failed to convince the Security Council to remove the reference in UNSCR 1701 to UNIFIL enforcing the arms embargo "at the request of the Lebanese Government." Hearing that the CODEL would travel the next day to Beirut, Livni said she had two messages for PM Siniora: first, the international community should condition its reconstruction assistance to Lebanon on getting a "sign of life" for the two kidnapped Israeli soldiers. Second, Siniora should feel that the international community is pressuring Syria to respect the arms embargo. Livni said Israel and the Palestinians could not end their conflict in the short run, but there was a need for "new ideas" to "get past the stagnation" but without risking Israeli security. Asked by Senator Levin whether she

thought the GOI could release a percentage of Palestinian tax revenues to Abbas, Livni responded that she was in direct contact with Abbas and it was not clear that he wanted the money. The question was whether such a step would strengthen Abbas or Hamas. End Summary.

¶2. (U) CODEL Warner (Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman John Warner, SASC Ranking Member Carl Levin, SASC member Senator Jeff Sessions, and Senator Mark Pryor), accompanied by the Ambassador, Political Counselor, and members of the SASC senior staff called on Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni at MFA October 3. MFA senior staff members also attended the meeting.

THANKS FOR U.S. SUPPORT

¶3. (C) Senator Warner explained that the CODEL was coming from Amman and Baghdad, and would head on to Beirut October 4 (note: the CODEL was unable to travel to Beirut due to a technical malfunction of their aircraft). Senator Warner observed that the CODEL was interested in linkages between what they had heard in Amman and Baghdad and Israel. Calling himself a strong supporter of Israel, Senator Warner added that the U.S. also needed to preserve its role as honest broker. Livni thanked the United States for its actions in the region, adding that with U.S. assistance, Israel was adjusting to new threats from Iran and elsewhere.

NEW OPPORTUNITY FOR ISRAEL TO WORK WITH MODERATE ARABS?

¶4. (C) Senator Levin told Livni that Jordanian King Abdullah had said he saw new opportunities for moderate Arab countries to work with Israel as a result of the Arabs' growing concerns about Iran. The Senator asked whether she shared that assessment. Noting that she had met with a number of Arab foreign ministers in New York during the UNGA, Livni said she agreed the Lebanon war had crystallized the Iranian threat and raised Arab fears about a rising Shia wave. The bad news, however, was that the gap between moderate Arab regimes and their people was growing. Arab public opinion still saw Israel as the enemy, even though Arab leaders understood that Israel had taken risks in disengaging from Gaza. Israel had common interests with moderate Arab leaders because of their fear of Iran and the Shia, but at the end of the day the Arabs would ask Israel to compromise on the Palestinians. Israel, she stressed, was ready to take "calculated risks," but it would not compromise on its survival. Senator Warner commented that the U.S. did not want Israel to make such a compromise.

¶5. (C) Livni said Israel had some shared interests with both Lebanese Prime Minister Siniora and Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, but the problem was that both were "weak." Abbas had pushed to include Hamas in the Palestinian legislative elections because he had felt he lacked legitimacy. Arab leaders understood that the resulting stagnation was not Israel's fault, but they still had to face the reality of a Hamas-led Palestinian Authority. In Lebanon, UNSC Resolution 1559 had called for disarming Hizballah, but Siniora had been too weak to implement it. Now, however, there was a second chance. Israel would "try to keep Abu Mazen as an address," she said, but he was very weak. Livni added that it was not yet clear what would be the impact of intra-Palestinian violence that occurred in Gaza a few days earlier.

IMPACT OF DEMOCRATIZATION

¶6. (C) Livni said the lesson of the past year was that Arab political parties that wanted to participate in elections must first be required to adopt democratic values before taking part in elections. This should have been a condition imposed on both Hamas and Hizballah. She commented that it was very hard for PM Siniora to dismantle Hizballah's militia

when Hizballah was a coalition partner in his government. She went on to note that UNSC Resolution 1701 and the Lebanon war could lead to a better future. Hizballah was weakened, and could be further undermined by enforcement of the arms embargo. Livni said she had ideas about imposing sanctions on states that violated the embargo. Nasrallah might be seen as a new Arab leader in some parts of the Arab world, but not in Lebanon, where he was seen as the "long arm of Iran." Livni said she understood Siniora's need to work in the context of Arab agreements, not the UN. For example, Siniora referred to the Taif Agreement instead of UNSCR 1559 when he spoke of dismantling militias in Lebanon. She concluded that only enforcing the arms embargo would ultimately weaken the role of Hizballah.

KIDNAPPED SOLDIERS "AN OPEN WOUND"

¶ 17. (C) Senator Pryor asked how the two Israeli soldiers kidnapped by Hizballah were affecting the process. Livni replied that the kidnapped soldiers were "an open wound" in Israeli society. Noting that many foreign leaders had advised her not to make the soldiers a central issue, Livni commented that Israel was not like other countries in this regard. The return of the soldiers had not been the goal of the Lebanon war, but Israel had wanted to send Hizballah and Hamas a message that there would be no Israeli tolerance for kidnappings. Israel hoped the two soldiers could be transferred to Siniora's custody, but so far there was no evidence they were still alive.

¶ 18. (C) Noting that the CODEL was supposed to travel to Beirut, Livni said she had two messages for Siniora. The first came from the wife of one of the kidnapped soldiers, who had told Livni that she understood that the international community would contribute to Lebanon's reconstruction, but said she did not understand why the international community did not help get proof that her husband was alive. Livni said she did not want to block assistance to Lebanon, but saw it as an opportunity to get something in return. Senator Warner said he would convey this point to Siniora, adding that the soldier's wife was entitled to know if her husband was alive.

¶ 19. (C) Turning to UNSC Resolution 1701, Livni said it was unfortunate that enforcement of the arms embargo was contingent on the request of the GOL. Senator Warner commented that Siniora did not have the means to enforce the embargo. Livni said Israel had sought to get this wording removed from the resolution, but had failed. She said it would "help Siniora" if the international community insisted Syria respect 1701 and stop its support for terrorism. Senator Warner said the CODEL would bring it up with Siniora.

NO END TO CONFLICT IN NEAR TERM

¶ 10. (C) Returning to the CODEL's meeting with King Abdullah in Amman, Senator Sessions asked if Israel faced an historic opportunity to work with the moderate Arabs against Iran. Livni said Arab leaders understood the danger, but needed something to show their own publics in terms of progress on the Palestinians. Senator Sessions pressed if this was more than Israel could offer. Livni said the U.S. needed to understand that the end of Israel's conflict with the Palestinians could not be achieved in the near term. There was instead a need to promote "new ideas to move past the stagnation" without risking Israel's security. Livni commented that Hizballah's missiles had disabused Israelis of the idea that the Separation Barrier would protect them. She thanked the U.S. for its cooperation with Israel on missile defense.

¶ 11. (C) Senator Levin asked Livni whether Israel could consider releasing a small percentage of the Palestinian tax revenues as a Ramadan gesture to Abbas. Livni replied that she had met with Abbas in New York and spoken to him again on the phone. When she asked him what he needed from Israel,

she said it was not clear that he wanted the tax money. Livni concluded that Israel would continue to work with Abbas. There were no conditions except when it came to the release of Palestinian prisoners, that could only come in response to the release of Corporal Shalit. Livni said, however, that the question with releasing tax revenue was whether it would help Abbas or Hamas.

¶12. (U) CODEL Warner did not have an opportunity to clear this cable.

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